000 One cannot but admire the bravery and stoicism displayed by the boy, but it is a dreadful ordeal and a most gruesome sight. How long this custom will be continued is a question one cannot answer. Knowing the Nuer, one would be almost tempted to say that it will never be discontinued as long as there remains one Nuer boy unmarked. Yet one Christian boy showed definitely that he had not the same fear of the evil eye as his companions. But until the Nuer people as a whole become Christians, there seems to be but little hope that this dreadful practice will be discontinued.

304 Near Abwong the tribal marks are not cut as deeply as they are at Nasser, and heal much more quickly.

A mother who has borne six or seven sons may have these tribal marks cut on her forehead at the same time as her youngest son has his cut. It is considered a great honour.

304 757 One may occasionally see a woman who has from one to four cuts across her forehead, but that indicates that she has had severe eye trouble, and the cuts have been made to relieve that condition. The cuts are on the forehead only, and do not extend to the region above the ears.

143 At least one Nuer—a man—is an albino. His hair, unbleached, is flaxen. His skin is pink-white. I have heard that other members of the same family are albinos, although some of them are black, but I have seen but this one member of the family. His parents are black. Nuer have always been afraid of him, fearing that he has a god in him.

826 When he was old enough to have the tribal marks cut, no one wanted to cut them, for they feared this god that was supposed to be in him. But the boy was insistent, so finally he had the tribal marks cut, but they were

14: Huffman M-5 (no date) 1931
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not cut as deep as they usually are, and his scars are but very thin lines. He is not yet married. One wonders what a Nuer girl's thoughts will be as the sight of this man's cattle lures her father and brothers to give her to him. 826

14: Huffman M-5 (no date) 1931
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Chapter Seven

SOME NOTES ON RELIGION, SUPERSTITIONS, AND MORAL LAW

NUER GODS

776 THE Nuer has long feared and worshipped he knows not what. There are various gods, Deng, Wiu, Cwol, and others. Some have power over rain, some over crops, disease, death, or lightning.

778 825 Some animals are considered sacred, but what is sacred to one man is not necessarily held sacred by another. It may be the crocodile, or the land crocodile, or a certain kind of snake. Every Nuer is certain to have a sacred animal which he will neither kill nor eat.

782 Sheep and cattle are sacrificed on various grounds in order to appease one god or another.

[776] 766 When a person is struck by lightning and killed he is said to have been taken by the god of lightning—Cwol. His body is laid upon a rack that is made in his house or barn and then covered entirely—over, under, and on all sides—with wood, ash, and soil. The door of the house is closed and the house is left desolate except for its silent owner. A person who has been struck and killed by lightning is never buried in the ground as others are.

784 No one will touch a person who has been stunned by lightning until he regains consciousness, for fear the god in him may be transmitted by contact.

778 A Nuer always considers the relatives of one who has been killed by lightning as sacred.

[326] [789] Any one who has some physical or mental deformity may be considered as having a god in him and be regarded as sacred and avoided for that reason.

781 The Nuer worship is a worship of fear. The missionary feels as if he were living in Old Testament times, and

GOD

776 196 contexts means speech, talk, or word, but when used in prayers and invocations in the phrase *'e rwacdu'*, 'it is thy word', it means the will of God; and when used in reference to creation it has almost the meaning of the creative word: 'he created the world, it is his word'.

773 The Nuer can hardly be said to have a creation myth, though our authorities[1] record some fragmentary accounts of the creation of men, parts of which I have myself heard. These state that men were created in the Jagei country of western Nuerland at a certain tamarind tree, at the foot of which offerings, and according to Mr. Jackson sacrifices, were sometimes made till it was destroyed by [171] fire in 1918. Many details in the versions given by Mr. Jackson and Captain Fergusson are clearly foreign, either Dinka or in Mr. Jackson's account Shilluk and in Captain Fergusson's account possibly even Atwot or Mandari, and I regard Father Crazzolara's version as the closest to Nuer tradition. In this version the tamarind tree, called Lic, was itself the mother of men who, according to one account, emerged from a hole at its foot or, according to another account, dropped off its branches like ripe fruits.

776 761 Whether they are speaking about events which happened *ne walka*, in the beginning or long ago, or about happenings of yesterday or today, God, creative Spirit, is the final Nuer explanation of everything. When asked how things began or how they have come to be what they are they answer that God made them or that it was his will that they have come to be what they are. The heavens and the earth and the waters on the earth, and the beasts and birds and reptiles and fish were made by him, and he is the author of custom and tradition. The Nuer herd cattle and cultivate millet and spear fish because God gave them these things for their sustenance. He instituted their marriage prohibitions. He gave ritual powers to some men and not to others. He decreed that the Nuer should raid the Dinka and that Europeans should conquer the Nuer. He made one man black and another white [326] (according to one account our white skins are a punishment by God for incest committed by our ancestor with his mother), one man fleet and another slow, one strong and another weak. Everything in nature, in culture, in society, and in men is as it is because

[1] H. C. Jackson, 'The Nuer of the Upper Nile Province', *Sudan Notes and Records*, 1923, pp. 70–71; V. H. Fergusson, 'The Nuong Nuer', ibid., 1921, pp. 148–9; J. P. Crazzolara, op. cit., p. 66.

16: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1956
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I have been told that there is a small lineage, called Waloak, in eastern Gaajok country who respect tortoises. There is a curious story accounting for their adoption of this totem. A man of the lineage had his cow taken by a man of a neighbouring village and his repeated requests for it to be returned to him were unavailing. One day when he was going to the river he found a tortoise and wrapped it in a sheepskin. He continued on his way, and as he was passing the village of the people who had taken his cow, he took the opportunity of once more asking for it. They refused his request, but at that moment the tortoise poked its head against the skin pressing it outwards. The man bent over it and told it to be quiet as it would get its share that day. Again he asked for his cow and again it was refused, and once more the tortoise wriggled in the skin and was told to be quiet. The people of the village then became frightened because they thought that the man had some powerful medicine in the sheepskin and that, if they did not give his cow back to him, they might die with their children and cattle; so they surrendered the cow. The mention of medicine suggests a recent origin for the story.

Some lineages respect birds. The Jibegh of western Nuerland respect the ostrich and will not use its feathers as ornaments. Their spear-name is *mut wuot*, spear of the ostrich. It is said that ostriches will not eat the millet of members of this clan. I once met a man with only three toes, stocky and undeveloped, to one of his feet. I was told that his maternal grandmother had the ostrich for totem, and that on the day of her daughter's marriage one of the bridegroom's people, as is the custom, threw a spear at her mud windscreen. She took the spear as her right and on examining it found that part of the shaft was bound with ostrich-skin. When her daughter bore a son he was deformed as I have described. The ostriches—or, rather, the spirit of ostrich—had stamped the likeness of an ostrich on the child.

Some small lineages of Dinka origin respect cattle egrets. One such lineage are the Rial of western Nuerland. I also met Lou tribesmen who have the cattle egret for totem and I was present when some of them sacrificed a goat to the cattle egret-spirit on the bank of the Sobat river, not because anyone was sick, which is a common occasion of sacrifice to a totem-spirit, 'but just because they think of (*tim*) it'. This spirit is said to be a river-spirit

16: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1956
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that 'one explanation put forward for this abstention is that the bird can fly in the skies and is accordingly in communication with the Great Spirit'.[1] The *jakok in rol*, the pied crow, a bird which frequents Nuer homesteads, is especially favoured because it is the bird of the female spirit *buk*, the mother of *deng*. Nuer say that 'everyone respects the pied crow', and one sometimes hears it spoken of as *kuaar*, priest. Nuer can therefore readily entertain the idea of a bird being the totem of a lineage, being, that is, an emblem of Spirit conceived of in relation to a lineage. Also, whilst I would hesitate to say that all Nuer have a high regard for snakes, it can be said that they do not go out of their way to harm them, whether they belong to lineages which respect snakes or not. They leave them in peace unless they are threatened by them or suddenly afraid of them. All Nuer seem to regard them as being in some sense manifestations of Spirit, so that, here again, it appears natural to those who do not respect them that other people should do so. Some of the more important totems are trees. To all intents and purposes, and so far as any question of showing them respect or otherwise is concerned, this means trees of certain species when they grow on village sites, and no Nuer, and not only those who respect them as totems, would injure trees growing near their homesteads. Nuerland is for the most part treeless savannah country, and trees which give shade, such as sycamores and to some extent the tamarind, are rare. Nuer have a feeling that those which give them shade in their sun-baked homes have grown there by a special dispensation of God. Their being there at all is a manifestation of Spirit, and all the more so if, as is sometimes the case, they have grown from saplings or cuttings planted as shrines to spirits. Here again, therefore, people can easily understand that such trees are regarded by some lineages as material manifestations of a special relationship of Spirit to themselves.[2] Rivers and streams also have a general spiritual significance for all Nuer because they are associated with *buk man deang*, which is the spirit of all rivers. It is *kwoth pini*, the spirit of water. Nuer say that '*yier e kwoth neini dial*', 'rivers are the spirit (totem) of everybody'. Again, monorchids are for all a sign of spiritual activity, as is also the birth of a calf with cuany markings.

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[1] H. C. Jackson, op. cit., p. 169.

[2] It may be noted that the Nuer word for tree, *jath* (pl. *jen*), is probably the same word as the generic term for totem in Dinka, *yath* (pl. *yeth*) (P. A. Nebel, *Dinka Grammar*, 1948, p. 170).

16: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1956
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776 845 species of creatures his first act would be to dedicate a beast of his herd to Spirit in the form and of the name of that species. Thus Spirit through its new attachment to whatever the natural species may be becomes in relation to that man and his family a new spirit of the below with its own distinctive material form different from the material forms of other spirits, and with a name derived from the natural species distinguishing it from other spirits with names derived from other species.

776 753 There are other ways in which Nuer say that a man may acquire a totemistic relationship to a natural species, though they also say that it is only rarely that the relationship is maintained by his descendants. They have told me that a man may become seized or possessed by a spirit associated with some creature, the seizure or possession being known by sickness and its diagnosis by one or other form of divination, and that he may afterwards respect it. In practice this is only likely to happen when the particular spirit has been the spirit of some forebear of the sick man. He and his relatives may cast their minds back to any such past affiliations when reflecting on what might be the cause of the sickness. People acquire totemistic obligations through affinal and maternal links. A man respects his wife's totems, at any rate to the extent of not eating or otherwise harming them shortly before having congress with her and during her pregnancies; and a woman respects her husband's totems. Nuer generally respect their mother's totems, but not always. A man said to me, in speaking of a totem of his mother's lineage, 'it is not shared by us, she was married into another lineage' (the speaker's own lineage). Nuer have assured me that a wife's totems will not persist in her husband's line of descent. Her sons' sons may respect them, but this is unlikely unless the spirits of the totems cause them sickness, and then they will generally be forgotten. Consequently, totems, other than those which belong to lineages and go with agnatic descent, enter into families for a generation or two and then go out of them again. But they may return. I once had an interesting discussion with some Nuer about a baby with deformed legs. My informants, who were not related to the child, held that the deformation must have resulted from one of his parents, who should have respected the monitor lizard, having killed or eaten this reptile. They made this deduction from the resemblance they saw between the legs of the child and those of the lizard. When I pro-

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16: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1956
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sacrifice Spirit, even as most materially conceived of, eats the blood and the chyme, not even in the sense of consuming their essence. Clearly, they are not materially consumed. Nuer do not say that Spirit feeds on (*mieth*) or eats (*cam*) or drinks (*madh, ruidh*) them. They do not use these words, but say that God, or a spirit, *kan*, takes, them. It is not a question of eating anything—what eating there is is done by the people—but of taking something, the life. This would seem to be a matter of great importance in an estimation of Nuer religious thought.

When, therefore, Nuer say that the blood and the chyme belong to God we are to understand, I would suggest, that this is a way of saying that the life belongs to him. It is true that we cannot say for the Nuer, as for the Hebrews, that the blood is the life. The word for life, *yiegh*, is also the word for breath, so that if we were to say that anything 'is' the life we would have to say it of the breath; though even here the word 'is' must not be taken to imply identity but a symbolic relationship. We must rather suppose that the blood and the chyme, and especially the blood, are also symbols of the life.

Human blood has for the Nuer a peculiar psychical value. When kinsmen and neighbours fight they use clubs instead of spears. No doubt this convention is most easily explained as making homicide a less likely outcome than if spears were permitted and, should it happen that a man be killed, of making a settlement easier to bring about on the grounds of absence of intent; but there may be a different, or at any rate an additional, reason for it. It may be that behind it is the notion that not the same responsibility is felt if the life-blood does not flow as it would from a fatal spear wound—that in a sense the man has not taken the life, that the death happened of itself, as Nuer would put it. That Nuer have some such idea is shown by the fact that a ghoul may be killed with impunity, but only if he is beaten to death with clubs and his blood is not shed. The blood of a man slain with the spear is moreover thought to enter in some way into the slayer, and he must therefore at once have his arm cut by a leopard-skin priest to let it out. This must mean that blood is thought to have some vitality of its own. The rite of initiation must be held in a homestead because the blood of the initiates must not be shed outside the home, and care is taken to bury it in the holes into which it flows lest dogs eat it. These examples, and others could be cited,

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782 826 show that human blood has mysterious properties but they do not justify our saying that Nuer regard the life as something contained in the blood. Moreover, in the case of cattle, which is the case at issue, we have to bear in mind that Nuer have no objection to shedding their blood. They do so when they cut their horns, when they castrate them, and when they pierce veins in the necks of cows (*bar*) in the dry season for veterinary purposes or, more usually, to obtain blood for boiling or roasting for their own consumption. But if the blood is not thought of literally as containing the life, the life of a sacrificed ox ebbs with its flow so that Nuer say either that God takes the life (or breath) or that he takes the blood—the blood and the breath being symbols of the life, as also appears to be, in a lesser degree, the chyme.

782 The chyme (*wau*) is what makes the flesh and maintains the life of the beast. Dr. Lienhardt tells me that *wei*, the word for it in Dinka, means in that language also 'life' and 'breath'. It does not appear to have so important a place in Nuer ritual as it has in the ritual of some other Nilotic peoples. The only reference in my notes to its sacramental use in connexion with sacrifice is to its being smeared on a Dinka at his adoption into a Nuer lineage, but Father Crazzolara says that sometimes after sacrifice the head of the family takes some of the chyme and after adding some of the beast's blood and his own spittle he rubs this mixture on his own breast, back of neck, and maybe also forehead, and perhaps also on the same parts of members of his family.[1]

782 574 God takes the *yiegh*, the life. Man takes the *ring*, the flesh, what is left over after the sacrifice. The carcass is cut up and skinned as soon as the animal falls. In most sacrifices the meat is consumed by members of the family and kin of the person on whose behalf it was made. In marriage and most other collective sacrifices it is divided among relatives, both paternal and maternal, in traditional portions; and the age-mates of the owner of the beast and representatives of lineages collateral to his may also have rights to shares. If the principal officiant is not a member of the family or of the close kin but a master of ceremonies of the family or a priest or a prophet, he also receives his share. This part of the proceed-

[1] Op. cit., p. 80. Among the Shilluk, at any rate in their sacrifices to end feuds, the chyme of the victim is put on the youths to indicate unity. A beast eats a bit here and a bit there: in the stomach it becomes one (D. S. Oyler, 'The Shilluk Peace Ceremony', *Sudan Notes and Records*, 1920, p. 299).

16: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1956
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acts, or features of them, we are sometimes compelled to make the attempt, as in this excursus on the spear, by the very emphasis given to them by the culture we are trying to understand.

Since we have no spears ourselves and nothing which takes their place in our lives it is difficult for us to appreciate their importance for Nuer. Nuer have no knives, other than that (*ngom*) used for cutting the marks of manhood at initiation, so that their fighting-spears, besides their use as weapons, have to serve where other peoples use knives.[1] A man's fighting-spear (*mut*) is constantly in his hand, forming almost part of him—when he is fighting, hunting, travelling, herding, dancing, displaying himself with his oxen, playing with his comrades, and so on—and when he lays it down it is within his reach; and he is never tired of sharpening and polishing it, for a Nuer is very proud of his spear. In writing a preliminary account of Nuer age-sets many years ago and without reference to the symbolic significance of the spear I wrote that 'one is surprised at the real feeling a Nuer expresses for his spear, almost as though it were animate and not a mere weapon'. Later I came to realize better that in a sense it is animate, for it is an extension and external symbol of the right hand, which stands for the strength, vitality, and virtue of the person. It is a projection of the self, so when a man hurls his spear he cries out either 'my right hand' or the name of the ox with which he is identified.

The spear, being an extension of the right hand, stands for all that the right hand stands for, for what is strong, virile, and vital, and consequently for masculinity and hence for the paternal kin and the lineage. Therefore during the discussions about bride-wealth in the byre of the bride's home on her wedding day the bridegroom's people sit on the right side of the byre and the bride's people on the left side. Therefore, also, when the carcasses of oxen sacrificed at marriage ceremonies are divided among the kin, the right fore and hind legs are the portions of the father's brothers and sisters and the left fore and hind legs are the portions of the mother's brothers and sisters. The left side symbolizes evil

[1] Being the only thing they have which cuts and is therefore suitable for shaving—their other spears only pierce—the verbal form of the word for fighting-spear, *mut*, besides its meaning of 'to spear' means 'to cut' or 'to shave hair'. When used in the last sense it often refers to ritual shaving of the head, and it may then be used for the whole ceremony of which shaving of the head forms part, as the final marriage ceremony of consummation and ceremonies in connexion with death.

16: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1956
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811 confirmed to some extent by the evidence of my photographs,[1] supported these conclusions, but I asked Dr. Lienhardt and Dr. Howell to verify them, which they have been able to do. It should [513] follow also that a husband sleeps on the right side of the hut and his wife on the left side, and here again Dr. Lienhardt has been good enough to confirm that this is the invariable practice. He has made a further and important observation. I was aware that the [823] west is associated with death and the east with life, but I did not know, till he told me, that east is identified with right and west with left, thus bringing into the left–right polarity the polar representations not only of life and death but also of the cardinal points east and west. I am indebted to Dr. Mary Smith for the further observation that Nuer speak of 'right-handed peace' (*'mal me cuec'*). They would never speak of left-handed peace.

It is in accord with what we have learnt of the associations with [826] left and right in Nuer thought that Nuer youths should emphasize the contrast between the two hands by putting the left arm 301 out of action altogether for months or even a year or two. This they do by pressing a series of metal rings (*thiau*) into the flesh of the left arm from the wrist upwards so tightly that sores and great pain result and the arm is rendered useless for any purpose other than the display of fortitude and as a passive instrument for the right hand to play upon (Plate XII). A ring on a finger of the right hand is rubbed up and down the discs on the imprisoned left arm to accompany the compliments and endearments of courtship. Such a mutilation is only fully intelligible in terms of symbolic associations. Here the fact that it is only the left horn of favourite [231] oxen which is debased (if the right is trained at all it is trained upwards) is of great significance, for, as will be seen, a man and his favourite ox are identified. What he does to his left hand he does to his ox's left horn: what he does to the ox he does to himself.

826 It is perhaps important to add that Nuer do not think of the 811 left hand as being in a material sense evil. Left-handed persons suffer no disabilities at all and are not considered in other respects as different from other people. Nuer do not, in my experience, attach any importance to the matter, but simply say of a left-

[1] All deformed horns in the photographs are left horns. Some branches in them, however, are to the left of the windscreens, but Nuer erect branches for practical purposes as well as for religious reasons, and I do not think it is possible to distinguish between them by sight.

16: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1956
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826 811 handed man that his left hand is his right hand. It is the quality of leftness, not the thing that is left, the hand itself, which is significant for them. Similarly, the left half of the severed carcass of a sacrificial animal is not intrinsically evil. It is always eaten by someone. It is bad symbolically, not in itself, and symbolically only in certain contexts or for certain people.

411 885 562 It is suggested that the spear as a projection of the right hand symbolizes the vitality of man, the manhood of man with the associations of lineage values that go with it. It is within the logic of the representation that we speak only of men. The spear stands for masculinity. Women do not bear fighting-spears. The spear does not go with femininity. Hence also boys do not bear [381] fighting-spears till at their initiation to manhood they are given them by their fathers. Before this event they are something in between men and women, and this is shown by the fact that they milk the cows, a feminine task that men may not undertake. That neither women nor boys bear spears means that they do not go to war and also that they do not sacrifice. It is not just that a woman may not slaughter the sacrificial victim —it is not, in any case, important who slaughters it—but that, not being able to bear the spear, she cannot make the sacrificial invocation, which is made by the spear in the right hand as well as by the mouth. She can indeed address Spirit at sacrifices, but if she does so she prays (*pal*): she does not invocate (*law*). This is understandable when we think of the spear as an extension of the right hand and hence as representing strength, masculinity, and goodness. Sacrifice, like war, belongs to that side of life, what we ourselves call the spear-side.[1]

FIG. 4
Instrument used in wedding invocations

[1] I was told that a wife may act as master of ceremonies in her husband's place and shout out the spear-name of his clan at a wedding. This is the *tuor ghok* mentioned later.

16: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1956
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name of the person and Gaaliek the name of the lineage of his descendants.

I have attempted to show that the spear brandished in sacrificial invocations stands for the person and that when this person speaks as a representative and on behalf of the clan, as he does in collective sacrifices, it stands for the clan. In the one case it is the right hand (vitality) of the individual and in the other the right hand (vitality) of the ancestor (the clan) which is emphasized. In the second case the spear is closely associated with the idea of the clan as a battle host.

When we ask why clans should be symbolized by a spear, or rather by the idea of a spear contained in a spear-name, and not by something else, we cannot give an acceptable answer in terms of the scarcity, and therefore high value, of iron nor in terms of simple utility. The symbol is not *yieth* or *you*, iron.[1] Nor is it the *bidh*, the fishing-spear, which is perhaps even more essential for Nuer than the fighting-spear, for they have no substitute for it and could not survive without a good supply of fish. It is the *mut*, the iron fighting-spear. The fact that the wood, horn, and bone pointed spears do not figure as symbols might suggest that it is because it is made of iron, which lasts longer and makes a more efficient weapon, that the *mut* is the symbol of clans, but it appears to me to be a more satisfactory explanation that it is because the *mut* not only stands for the right hand and hence vitality but is also the symbol of going to war and of making sacrifice.

The word *mut*, besides meaning a fighting-spear, has a general sense of taking part in war and raiding: *'ce Nath wa mut'*, 'the Nuer went raiding'; *'ca mut nang Jaang'*, 'war was taken (by the Nuer) to the Dinka'. The idea expressed by the word *mut* in these examples is not so much the general idea of war and raiding as the idea of a collectivity, the clan or lineage in its political or tribal embodiment, going to war or going on a raid. Hence Father Kiggen correctly translates *'te he mud mediid'* (his spelling) as 'they have a big army'.[2] By synecdoche 'spear' stands for 'battle host'.

[1] It is true that Nuer lick any metal in taking an oath (p. 197), but I regard this as being a derivation from licking a spear, for which any metal stands as a substitute, in the same way as the honorific titles of the Gaatgwakir clan, son, and daughter, of iron, derive from the *wic* spear. The words *yieth*, metal, and *yiedh*, to spear or to stab, are surely connected.

[2] J. Kiggen, *op. cit.*, p. 106. One may ask, in the light of this discussion about